LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 439
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

My Twelve Years in a Monastery

Joseph McCabe
(Once the Very Reverend Father Antony)

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 439
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

My Twelve Years in a Monastery

Joseph McCabe
(Once the Very Reverend Father Antony)

HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS
GIRARD, KANSAS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This is the story of the most picturesque and, intellectually, most disreputable decade of my life. That may or may not entitle it to a hearing, but I venture to put it into print rather because it is a faithful description of one of the strangest of the tragi-comedies which linger in this confusion of medieval and modern ideas which we call our Enlightened Age. It tells you how men come to attempt to live the life of monks under the arc lights of the twentieth century: how grown men are induced to masquerade in the robes, or a genteel imitation of the robes, of the Italian beggars of the thirteenth century, in the hope that their angelic wings may sprout more vigorously after death; and how, when the mists of modern thought and sentiment obscure the battlements of heaven, they find consolation in such poor joys by the wayside as this wicked world affords.

In short, this little book will reveal so much of the secret of Rome's comparative success in America and Britain that I at once, without further compunction or apology, begin to perpetrate it.

J. M.

Ash Wednesday, 1927.

MY TWELVE YEARS IN A MONASTERY

CHAPTER I.

MY EARLY VIRTUE.

It is just thirty-one years since, on Ash Wednesday of the year 1896, I flung into a corner of my monastic cell the sandals and the brown robe that I had worn for twelve years and went out nervously into the pale sunshine. It appeared that many were curious to hear my experiences, and, although I have never posed as an Escaped Monk, I lectured here and there, with all the portentous solemnity of youth, on "Why I Left the Church of Rome." I imagined the entire universe, at least as far as the Magellanic Clouds, on tiptoe to hear my reasons. But one Sunday, when the lecture was over, and I still blushed before the storm of applause, a dour Scottish schoolmaster arose and said: "What we want to know is, not why you left, but what the devil you were doing in that galley at all." So let me introduce my early self and show how easily even a comparatively sane youth can become a monk.

There are two strains—both fighting strains, by the way—in my ancestry. In the first half of the nineteenth century a vagrant member of a stout old Protestant family of East Anglia

strayed over England until he reached the sleepy little town of Macclesfield, where he left his bones and his young daughter. During the same years a vagrant member of the ancient Irish family of the McCabes ("Sons of the Abbot") wandered from Dublin to the same town in northwestern England, and left there his bones and his son. There, in the course of time, the Protestant maid received the light of the true faith and a wedding ring, and the eighth-born of her almost annual blessings was called Joseph; because the great St. Joseph, an unofficial legend says, rewards every mother who thus honors his name by making a priest of the boy.

Seven years later little Joseph was taken to live in Manchester, where the very atmosphere hums with talk about big interest, good security and sound investments. Moreover, the first large object upon which the windows of Joseph's soul opened was a monastery, planted right opposite his home: the first spectacle that intrigued his tender mind was a group of men in rough brown robes, belted with rope girdles, men of shaven head and sandalled feet, who were, it appeared, the boldest speculators in that great commercial city. They were to receive a hundred-fold reward in heaven, during all eternity, for the very obvious austerities which they practiced on earth.

It were sheer blindness not to discern the hand of Providence in the ordering of my days: but let us still talk of Joseph objectively for a page or two, and then we can be quite candid. He was a pious little prig, an "altar-

boy" of great assiduity in the services of the tall church which almost overshadowed his home. More than once he wondered, when he heard the story of Elijah, whether the fiery chariot would not some day come blazing through the leaden sky of Manchester and take him up to heaven.

He was also rather clever, a little devil for logic, born with a syllogism in his mouth. That was the one fatal mistake of the angels who were deputed to fashion him. The monks had a large elementary school, and Joseph was the infant prodigy of it. When the visitors came, he was put on the desk to pipe out a pathetic ballad ("Driven from Home") or to recite Southey's formidable "Cataract of Lodore," which no other boy in the school could memorize. He won all the medals and prizes which were to be won in a poor school where your father paid, as you rose, from six to twelve cents a week for your education. He . . . Enough, enough. The point is that the monks determined to make a monk of Joseph.

Then his home was very Catholic. The bedrooms—in a Protestant world you would not put these things in the parlor—shone with saints and angels and bleeding hearts. The mother, as high in character as she was strong in sense, was profoundly religious. She held St. Joseph to his unwritten contract and saw in the boy's piety the germ of fulfillment; though she was too wise and kindly to press. She was of the type who, on principle, would rather see a priest stricken by lightning at the altar than see him discard his robes; yet, when

her own son made the great apostasy, she wrote him, sadly and grandly: "I do not understand, Joe, but I know you."

The father was religious enough, as far as belief went. He could easily have believed that by some miracle Jonah kept the whale in his belly for three days. There hung on the wall an ancient bookcase containing the remnants of quite a respectable little library of twenty years earlier, but the rearing of eight children on ten dollars or so a week had diverted his attention from Emerson's *Essays* and Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* and persuaded him to meet life genially. He liked his beer and laughter and he was entirely honest and honorable and kindly. When in later years his son thoughtlessly went to lecture in Manchester, and the name of the apostate glared at the pious from every boarding, the old man dissembled. "To tell you the truth," another son explained, "he had never seen the family name so large before." George Moore once assured me that that was worth a two dollar book . . . *Pax manibus*. May my children be able to cherish my memory as I honor that of my parents.

In these circumstances the path to the preparatory college in the monastery across the street could hardly be missed by Joseph. The monks wanted him. The whole world subtly pressed him. Yet Joseph kicked against the pricks for two or three years. Possibly even in those early years he had some subconscious misgiving abont the thousand-percent interest in the Celestial Bank. At all events he had red blood. More than once he led his schoolmates

to "scuttle" (stone) the boys of nearby Protestant schools, singing lustily,

> Prodidog, Prodidog, go to hell,
> While all the Catholics ring the bell.

That was a work of piety, but more than once his young buttocks tingled after some forbidden escapade. He would not be a monk. At thirteen he began to earn a dollar a week and dream of becoming a prince of commerce. In a great Manchester warehouse he heard oaths which made him pale and salacious stories which made him red, and altogether he learned in advance a very great deal of the more piquant part of Moral Theology. But he never swore or lied, or did anything more wicked than smoke a furtive cigarette. He was incurably virtuous; so the devil gave him up, and the monks got him.

Thus at the age of fifteen he abandoned his high commercial ambitions and went back to the little college in the monastery. College! There was as much pedagogy in it as in a straw-strewn medieval schoolroom. A friar who might have made an excellent carpenter took every class. Of the eight boys, six were fresh from Irish farms and very raw. The seventh is now a local politician of distinction in America. The eighth was Joseph. He was a day-scholar, and he taught himself. In three months he read Cicero easily, in six months he read French works of edification, and in twelve months he read the Greek New Testament. The ambitious friar-teacher taught himself a little Hebrew and, with purple effort,

even tried to squeeze this into Joseph's one year at dead and living languages. At all events, a faded little copybook before me seems to show that by the end of the year Joseph wrote Latin—not that of Cicero, but of the Church—with ease and accuracy, though not elegance. His "classical education" was complete. Eleven months from the day on which he had opened a Latin grammar he and the other seven were transferred to a monastery at Killarney to become novices, or monklings, in the Order of St. Francis of Assisi.

It does not matter whether or no this is a sufficient extenuation of Joseph's apparent simplicity in becoming a monk at the age of sixteen. What matters is that you have here much light on the proceedings of the modern Catholic Church. Its boast of remaining always full of vitality, yet loyal to medieval standards in the twentieth century is at once seen to be a hollow sham. "Look at our tens of thousands of monks and nuns," the preacher intones, "even in your modern cities. No other religion can inspire such things." No: the others have not sunk so low as that.

There is a sense in which it would be possible to treat monks and nuns with respect. Christ assuredly recommended voluntary poverty and chastity, and if mature Christian men and women chose to retire into special homes for the cultivation of those uncomfortable virtues one could think it natural. But if the Catholic Church of our time waited for even youths and maidens in their later teens or early twenties to embrace this life, its religious

orders would shrivel and disappear. In all my monastery career I knew only two youths out of their teens to ask admission, and both left again in disgust, and one man of mature years, who found that (the examination standard being lowered for monks) this was the only way in which he could become a priest; and he also quitted.

So the Church deliberately captures the young and enmeshes them in the conventual system before they can have any human realization of its meaning. Boys are usually ensnared at the age of thirteen or fourteen, rarely after sixteen, and drafted into a preparatory college. From that day onward they are allowed to see little of "the world," and the prize of the priesthood, with all the prestige it brings—for they are almost always poor boys—is meretriciously dangled before their eyes. The simple Catholic layman defends this contemptible system on the ground that God inspires certain boys with a "vocation" and they may justly be protected in monastic colleges. In reality, the "vocation" generally means that some priest has picked out a desirable boy and persuaded him that it is "a fine thing" to join the monastery and become a priest. There is very little scrutiny of qualifications. The thinning ranks *must* be recruited—for the greater glory of the Church and the confusion of heretics.

When I was last lecturing in Australia, in 1923, the Catholic weekly had a full-page advertisement calling for boys to be educated for the priesthood. Even I, with all my knowl-

edge of clerical audacity, was astonished to find this appeal openly telling boys "not to trouble about a vocation," as this might come afterwards in the course of their training!

We shall see that the Church not only confines these little victims of its policy, but at the age of sixteen or seventeen fastens upon them a chain which a Catholic boy can hardly break. Meantime let us notice the "education." The preliminary or classical education usually lasts more than a year. Any teacher will, indeed, smile at the idea of learning Latin, Greek, and French in a year. With very heavy home-study I succeeded at least in acquiring a good knowledge of Latin in that time, but the farmers' boys who were my colleagues had in some cases only the same training and at the end, when they closed their Latin books, they could hardly read a phrase of Cicero or Virgil at sight. Some parts of their own ritual of Greek which they received they entirely lost within a year.

The education of the priest, in other words, is lamentable. The great bulk of the time is, we shall see, devoted to technical theological studies. The literary or classical training is atrocious; of science they are taught nothing and "history" means in their colleges the tissue of fairy-tales which I have torn to shreds in my series of Little Blue Books. Even in the Benedictine and Jesuit colleges, which profess to give a higher education, the system is thoroughly bad. Few priests know Latin well—the Latin of their ritual books is generally a debased and simplified Latin—and not one in a

hundred knows Greek or has any acquaintance with modern literature. And all this is *a deliberate part of the Church's policy*. Not only are men thus educated little likely to contract the prevailing epidemic of skepticism, but the Church can securely rely upon them to broadcast its fabrications from the pulpit and forbid the Catholic laity to read the "lies" of critics of the system.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMEDY OF THE CLOISTER.

In the merry month of May, of the year 1885, I arrived in the Irish town of Killarney, in the lake-land of beauty, and "entered the monastery." How the soul of a grown man would have been shaken in the circumstances! Nature in its fairest raiment, lit by the sunniest of its smiles, lay all round us. A people full to the lips of gaiety rubbed shoulders with us until we passed the dark portal of the friary. Pretty colleens turned the bright eyes of dawning womanhood upon us. And we were going into this secluded prison, this living tomb, to swear never again to taste a single joy of earth. Once those doors closed upon us, they would for a whole year not even open to let us walk in the fields, and at the end of that time we should be bound by dire vows to live in poverty and virginity until the last night fell.

But we were boys of sixteen—the Church saw to that—the glamor lay before, not around or behind us. Instead of farmers or clerks we were to become men of lofty importance in the Catholic body, shining in golden vestments, waving the hand of blessing over the bent knees and bowed heads of dukes and lawyers. The colleens! What did that matter? For my part I was, from broken health and hard study, not sexually developed until my twenty-sixth year. The vow of chastity meant to me little more

than if I were asked to renounce my chances of the Presidency of the United States. The Church saw to that. As to poverty . . . .

Well, the comedy of the cloister began almost immediately. Having been a day scholar at the Manchester monastic college, I had seen little of the life of the monks. Certainly their "poverty" had not intimidated me, and there were at times little accidents of phrase or gesture which, had I been a few years older, would have seemed like the flutter of a curtain that hid realities from me. A coarse word escaped at times. Glasses clinked in closed rooms. Once a lay or serving brother—a monk who is not a priest—put me in a strange confusion by attempting . . . We shall see enough of this. The severest orders are given to keep scandal from the students.

In the year of noviceship at Killarney again I saw little of the real monastic life. It is the year of religious trial, or test of vocation. Secular study is forbidden—I once incurred severe punishment by dipping into Greek grammar on the sly—and the time is spent in prayer, meditation, and learning the ritual and daily routine and rules. One of three wings of the upper floor of the friary was assigned to novices. It was cut off by a partition and locked at night. I wondered why. We had a separate and remote common-room. But for meals and at prayers we joined the dozen monks, and the mask fell at times from the very human faces.

Two priest-monks whom I had known from earliest years at Manchester were now in the

Killarney friary, and I got a close-up of them. One of them, a tubby and genial little Englishman, the idol of my boyhood, stood the strong light well. Not so pious as I had thought, as fond of three spots of whiskey as any man, he was nevertheless a good man in an unhealthy world and he died at Killarney after bravely ministering to a typhus patient.

The other case was more interesting: a dark lean friar this, of strained and nervous look, who had in my native district persuaded so many young girls to enter a severe nunnery at York that his confessional was humorously called "the booking-office for York." Surely a saint, we all thought. He was, I found, a secret dipsomaniac. At once at Killarney I was troubled to see with what little respect or regard the others treated him. In later years he disappeared from amongst us and I was then old enough to learn the truth. "If," said our superior, a really religious man, to me, "you put whiskey before him and held a revolver at his temples, threatening to shoot if he touched it, he could not help but drink." They found, in London later, that he spent his time visiting Catholic wives, in the absence of their husbands, and demanding whiskey, and doubtless other amenities. They tolerated this for ten years until he committed the unpardonable sin of letting the faithful see him drunk occasionally. Then he was expelled.

With the drinking, in fact, began my perception of the comedy of monastic life. At five every morning a brother made the round of the cell-doors with a large wooden mallet. "Praised

be Jesus Christ," he mumbled sleepily, in Latin, to us students of Latin. He pounded each door until we answered "Amen," and then he sent the clang of a great iron bell through the whole building. We had a quarter of an hour for toilet; and in later years most of us slept again for ten minutes, trusting to the angels to awaken us in time, or we should be spread-eagled (made to kneel with arms outstretched in the middle of the floor) at dinner.

We slept, as all monks sleep, in our rough woolen day-shirts, and it needed only three seconds to throw over this the rough brown robe, gird it with the knotted rope, and slip the leather sandals on our stockingless feet. In a common lavatory, with tin basins under a row of brass taps over a zinc-lined trough, we hurriedly washed and went off to chapel. There we chanted (in monotone), or droned, the Matins and Lauds for an hour, spent half an hour in silent meditation, and heard Mass. The day thus began with two and a half hours of prayer, and there were to be three or four further hours during the day. The Catholic is apt to think this a kind of fire-insurance of our wicked modern civilization. If he really believes that men can keep their minds concentrated on sacred things so long, he has a high idea of human nature. But the sequel will show how far from heroic the monks were.

Breakfast consisted of bread and butter, and coffee served in handleless bowls. Cups and saucers were deemed inconsistent with the austerity of our life. But the chief meal, the midday dinner, knew no austerity. Even dur-

ing the long fasts we had, after a sound soup, mounds of fresh fish from the coast, and often salmon from the rivers or trout from the lakes. Water was prohibited. Even we youngsters had to begin at once to drink, and drain, our two pots of beer a day. A matter of discipline and uniformity, we were told. And every few weeks came a saintly festival. Then the silence in which we usually ate our meals, save that one friar read aloud the Latin bible or a pious work, was suspended and merry talk swept the heavily laden tables. On such festivals, or about thirty times a year, wine followed the meal. We began, were in fact compelled, at sixteen to drink two or three glasses of claret or port on top of a mug of beer. I remember still the Christmas orgy. So many Catholic ladies of the district, remembering our terrible austerities, pleaded with our superior to "accept" a goose or a turkey, a trifle or a pudding, that the score of us gorged on rich food for more than a week. If Catholic women did but know how they are duped!

For my part, the rich diet soon laid me low and it poisoned my digestive system for thirty years. My parents were not poor and had never stinted food, but I contracted chronic dyspepsia three months after entering that ascetic establishment. The only permanent thing which twelve years of holy living did for me was to enfeeble my stomach. My system was wrecked with severe dyspepsia before I was seventeen, and for at least six further years I worked and suffered with the frame of a chronic invalid. "He will never live to be

forty," I used to hear my colleagues say. They are all dead. I am in the prime of life.

Casuistry easily reconciles a boy to these bacchanalian alleviations of the ascetic life and to say the truth, we quickly learned to look forward to the "feast day." Our elders, the full-fledged monks, did not wait for official festivals. Many a time at night, when my illness kept me awake, I caught the faint sound of very worldly songs in some distant room or heard the colliding of bottles which were being taken from the pantry. In time I learned that once a week at least the wine and whisky flowed pretty freely. And this was a model monastery, under strictest orders to avoid scandalizing the young.

The year dragged slowly, its heavy monotony (on paper) constantly relieved by some diversion. High summer came, and, as we knelt, face buried in hands, in our choir-stalls for the silent meditation, the fat elder friars snored sonorously. A priest I afterwards knew pretended that he had joined our order at one time, but had been dismissed because he snored so loudly at meditation that the others could not sleep. In late summer and fall the wasps swarmed in our choir, and in their last languid hours they crept over our bare feet, as we knelt, and created many a wicked intermezzo. My health broke so completely that I was excused much of the long psalm-droning, and I sat for hours in the spacious garden—we were forbidden to go out—gazing on the lovely panorama of the mountains.

In those hours of solitary brooding the devil

began his long struggle for my soul. I was too weak to be vicious. The atmosphere of the cloister had no more power to demoralize me than the sultry air of a Manchester warehouse had had. But my mind weakened not with my body, and presently it entered upon a terrible line of thought. I was still only sixteen when the wave of modern skepticism first hit me.

The monastic life is, as I said, a commercial speculation. It is based upon the (supposed) express assurances of Christ that those who left father and mother and sister, and especially other people's sisters, and all their possessions would receive a hundredfold reward in heaven. Well, I had done it. I had abandoned my very name and was now "Brother Antony." They had given me the choicest patronal name at their disposal, that of St. Antony of Padua: a dear little monk of the thirteenth century who was flogged for protesting against the corruption of his monastery (that, by the way, is *not* in popular Catholic lives of him) and was so learned that he was called "the Hammer of the Heretics." So, as I explained in a recent book, I resolved to be equally learned and equally deadly to heretics. But, to begin with, I said to myself, like that foreign preacher whose knowledge of English was still imperfect, "Let us examine our fundament" (which, unfortunately, to his audience of schoolboys meant the part on which they sat).

The interest promised on my spiritual investment was not bad. What about the security? Alas, within a few months I perceived that I had only the word of the priests for

that, and already I was dimly aware of their monumental ignorance. An agonizing doubt crept over me, and I was never long free from it during those twelve miserable years of shattered health, heavy study, and uncongenial company. Why not leave? Every Catholic at least knows the discomfort of the youth or maid who is pointed out as one who "put his hand to the plow and turned away." Besides, I had the desire to become a priest which, whatever its inspiring motives, priests call a "vocation," a summons from God, and my father-confessor neatly countered my doubts and bade me go on. "Who are you to doubt these things?" he would say. "Look at Cardinal Newman, Pasteur, Laplace. . ." He persuaded me that all my doubts would be answered when, in a year or two, I learned philosophy. But it was hard waiting, and one summer day, I remember, I put a glass of water on the ledge of my cell and, kneeling beside it, asked God to relieve me by turning it into wine. It seemed such a little thing for so great a power to do, and I asked Mary to put in a word for me, but my sad heart grew heavier when I saw that the sunlight still shone on pure water. I drank it thoughtfully.

From all of which you may gather that I was, even then, a queer bird, and the monks, who wanted my brain, were troubled. "How they ever admitted a born anarchist like you," said a priest to me after I had seceded, "is a mystery." Only once did I furnish palpable proof of my anarchism. Another novice had sprinkled a few blades of grass on my shoulders, and the master, coming up, suspected that

we had been romping in the grass and demanded an explanation. As the boy stood by, I looked to him to explain and exonerate me. It was against my code of honor to charge another with even so innocent an act. They nearly expelled me for that moral delicacy—"disobedience," they called it—and I had to kneel humbly on the floor for a quarter of an hour while the others chatted and drank their bowls of coffee after dinner. My health gave them further concern. But the Holy Spirit who guided the counsels of my superiors bade them overlook everything and admit me, and thus secured for me the first part of my training as an apostle of infidelity.

I had stood the test, and the great day of the vows arrived. At the age of seventeen, kneeling in the church in solemn ceremony before a thrilled congregation of Irish Catholics, I vowed celibacy (virginity), poverty (never to own a cent or any object), obedience (to my superiors) for life. These were what are called "simple" or provisional vows. The Pope can release from them on application. It is a trick of the shrinking Papal power. Grown men will not now become monks, so the Papacy in the full light of the nineteenth century deliberately lowered the age and permitted boys and girls to take the formidable vows. Casuistically, it called these simple or dispensable vows, to be followed three years later by "solemn" and irrevocable vows; but it knew what it was doing. Not one youth in a thousand would take the terrific step of asking a dispensation from Rome and facing his Catholic friends once

more. The entire misery and hypocrisy of the system, as I will describe it, are due to the calculating and inhuman policy of the Vatican.

The monk who finds in time what the sacrifice means and feels that he has no special faith or fervor to sustain it has, as we see, much compensation, but the lot of the young girl who takes the veil of a nun at sixteen or seventeen is, on the other hand, tragic. Catholic mothers seem to be reduced by their beliefs to the callousness of feeling with which their mothers once sent their daughters to the altar of human sacrifice. Nunneries are, I think, rarely houses of vice, but they hide a vast amount of misery. It is a myth that the bulk of the nuns are "happy." They must lie to their parents and friends on that point. They are victims of a cold and cruel priestcraft—a system so inhuman that I have known a distinguished cardinal (Manning), in a moment of humanity, against the most solemn principles of his Church, to open the door of a convent and assist a young professed (or vowed) nun to go back to the world without any dispensation. It was a noble act—and a mortal sin.

CHAPTER III.

BEHIND THE CLERICAL SCENES.

Figure me to yourselves, then, a monkling of seventeen, in brown corded robe and sandals, a circle six inches in diameter shaven in the top of my head, a body racked by illness, a heart heavy with doubt, a brain afire with questions. From Killarney we went to a monastery in a suburb of London to complete our studies and prepare for the priesthood. There, ailing and unhappy—I fainted once a week—I spent six years as a student and three as a professor, seeking the answer to my questions, unable to disbelieve until I had exhausted the library of Catholic literature.

For a full account of these studies I refer the reader to my larger work, *Twelve Years in a Monastery*. Three years after I had published that work an important priest whom I still respected visited me, and he saw the book on my shelf. "That," he said sadly, "is the most deadly work we have had to face for twenty years." I submitted that I must tell the truth, and he did not question that it was the truth. One who was present at a clerical dinner in London told me that the cardinal and those about him fell to discussing the book. None questioned its truth; nor has any Catholic writer ever answered it, or any reflection on

my character or veracity ever appeared in print.

Here I will dismiss the studies briefly, though a few words must be said, partly to explain how priests can spend many years at study yet remain so comprehensively ignorant, and partly to show the folly of those Catholics who plead that their Church gave me even a hundredth or a thousandth part of such erudition as I have. On the latter point it is almost enough to say that the eight years of my training did not include *one single lesson in either science or history*, which now form the bulk of my knowledge, and that even in languages my clerical teachers gave me only a meager knowledge of French, the early and useless rudiments of Greek, and so poor a training in Latin that, but for my own private studies, I could not read Tacitus.

The dozen teachers I had during those years would not have been permitted to take a lower class in a rural elementary school. One only was a man of considerable ability, and to this stimulating and intimate friendship during many years I owed much; though, as I will describe, he extinguished the debt by one cruel stroke when I left the Church. Through my friendship with him, for he was the highest in authority, I got rid of one incompetent teacher after another, until the professors of my course came to be known humorously in the fraternity as "the Removables." They dreaded me, and taught me nothing.

First was a lean, dark young Scotchman who undertook to complete our Latin and teach

us "rhetoric." I doubt if he could read Virgil at sight, and of Greek he was entirely innocent. His temper was ungovernable and after six months I whispered in the ear of the higher authority. Long years afterwards, when he became a preacher of note, I found that he was a thirsty soul, and in the middle of a brilliant series of sermons on the truth of the faith he departed with all the funds that chanced to be in the friary. They traced him to a small hotel in Brussels, where daughters of the pavement are cheap, and, after one gorgeous month, which exhausted the funds, he was persuaded to return to his pulpit and again expound the glories and purities of Catholic Truth. He made a second and similar dash for liberty two years later, but the poor devil failed to earn the poorest living, and he returned sadly to preaching the truth. A cousin of his was in my course, and he in turn became a noted preacher; and a few years ago this man wrote to me to ask me for $100 to enable him to leave the priesthood. Such is the world behind the decorative church scenery.

My learned friend next lent a hand in our education. His self-taught erudition was large and weird, but his *idea* of teaching was peculiar, and his duties were so numerous that he gave few lessons. A prim, light-haired Englishman, very popular with the ladies, undertook us next; and I got him fired for incompetence after a month or two. One day, with a furtive eye on me, he bade us write an essay on "The Use of Big Words." The title alone was deemed sufficient to rebuke me. He sighed,

and was silent, when I handed in my essay. It was entitled "On the Employment of Sesquipedalian Terminology," and it contained about four words to the line. He passed resignedly from the college.

The authority next brought his own brother, who was also of our fraternity, to teach us, thinking doubtless that this would intimidate me. The man was clever, but mentally unbalanced, a sex-victim of the morbid type. I learned later that, on pretext of his spiritual duties, he used to visit the ladies of the parish and demand such information as how many times a week they had. intercourse with their husbands, etc. He left us in a thunder-cloud after a few weeks. The eighteen months of classics and rhetoric were completed by an ultra-pious young friar of twenty-six, who hated me cordially because I was as virtuous as he was, and who could not have taught little girls how to nurse dolls.

Our lectures were supposed to be given in Latin, but neither teachers nor pupils knew it well enough. When, in later years, I became a professor, and delivered my first lecture, as the rules enjoined, in Latin, I found at the close that the youths trained in Latin as I had been had not understood a word. But I had worked industriously and mastered Latin, and it was in a fever of nervous expectation that, at the age of nineteen, I began the course of philosophy. Now my irrepressible doubts were to be silenced. From the start I had bitten into the very foundation. Was there a God? Was the mind immortal? About the Pope or

Christ or the Bible I troubled little. Protestant writers who deplore that I passed into skepticism in an emotional reaction against Rome are radically wrong. From my seventeenth year I was concerned only with the answer to those two fundamental questions, and, when eleven years of assiduous study brought no proof, I was logically outside all religions.

What is called "philosophy" in the training of a Catholic priest has almost no relation to what is known as philosophy at a university. It is a short course of logic as it was taught a century ago, metaphysics as it was taught seven centuries ago, and ethics as it never was taught anywhere. The logic is unswerving, but the premises and foundations are cobwebs from the schools of the Middle Ages. It was years after I left the church that I learned what modern philosophers like Hegel and Schelling and Lotze, Royce and Euchen and Höffding, had said. In a later year I had, as I will tell, a course of Catholic philosophy, under my friend Mercier (later Cardinal Mercier) at Louvain University, but it was little less antiquated. No Catholic priest knows philosophy, and the pride of the Church in the tissue of discredited medieval fancies to which it gives that name is humorous.

Private study again taught me something, and, barren as I believe philosophy to be in its results, I owe to the study of it a very material gain in clearness and order of thought. My "professor" was a worse dud than his predecessors. He was an eccentric, flat-footed, red-faced Belgian whom everybody ridiculed.

I doubt if he had ever heard of Plato. A small Latin manual of about three hundred pages contained all the logic, metaphysics and ethics we were to learn. I tried to put some life into it by introducing questions of science—for there is *one* scientific work, twenty years old, in the monastic library—but he snapped like a fish at a fly. He did not know the difference between a nebula and a neuron. When, after a time, I found him passing spiritual love-letters to one of my fellow pupils, he joined the large group of the retired.

One year sufficed to teach us philosophy, which is supposed to be "the science of all things, visible and invisible, and of the causes thereof." It is not uncommon, though two years are usually devoted to philosophy, for priests to receive no more than this qualification to dogmatize for the remainder of their lives on the deepest problems of reality; and the study is always made at an age when no youth can grasp real philosophical problems.

At the age of twenty my colleagues and I moved on from philosophy to theology. This is the main part of a priest's training. He must master two huge Latin volumes of Moral Theology to fit him for the confessional, and three of Dogmatic Theology to enable him to preach soundly. I have the volumes still, and I see that they amount to 3,436 closely printed quarto pages on subjects to which modern culture never gives a thought! You need not be impressed when a priest explains that he spent six or seven years over his studies. Most of

the time he was chewing this sawdust from the floors of medieval schoolrooms.

The learned friar to whom I have referred taught us Dogmatic Theology, and for the other branch we had a pathetic figure of a professor. He was one of the few really refined men amongst the monks, and had been educated at a good college. But from the start the poor man caught my disapproving eye and shuddered. We crept on so slowly that I suspected that he gave in one lesson only what he could learn the night before; and when, at the end of three months, he proposed to sum up and review all that we had learned, he saw my lips move. I was ordered, under obedience, to say aloud the words I had formed, and the poor man drooped when it came (in Latin): "That won't be difficult." The penance was on him. He was the sixth victim of my youthful mania for new professors. In him, too, the morbid system had debased a good man. His craving for drink became so great that he would prowl round in search of beer before breakfast. He died, prematurely, of dropsy.

The life, meantime, remained as I have described. We students were more or less segregated, to keep scandal from us—the whole atmosphere is saturated with fear of scandal—and we joined the seven or eight priests only at the services and at the silent meals. Two lectures, six or seven hours of study, and five or six at prayer, filled the bulk of the monotonous day. After the midday dinner we had an hour and a half for "recreation," which was a dreary perambulation of the large garden, but

for the rest of the day the law was silence. Neither that nor any other monastic rule was ever strictly observed, and we mitigated the harshness of the life with much fun. I have spoken of an eccentric Belgian priest who professed to teach us philosophy. He had some disease which made him reluctant to mount stairs, and I noticed that after dinner he used to go out into the garden. Next day he was confounded to find four of us pop our heads out of the window just above him and interrupt his proceedings. We were not quite the miniature saints whom the people admired in chapel. More than once I have seen the youths strongly influenced by drink and sex on feast-days.

I had passed my boyhood, and the tragic comedy of the whole pitiful business began to appear to me, yet my rigorously logical mind clung to the position that, if Christ was God and *had* promised a hundredfold reward, the system was sound. Philosophy, which purported chiefly to demonstrate the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, had not satisfied me. The Catholic arguments on these points are empty verbiage, valueless in themselves, and almost irrelevant in view of the generally complete ignorance of science. I plodded on with my Sisyphean task of finding proof, and I mounted the lower steps, from year to year, of the clerical ladder. My learned professor and friend, who was also my confessor, knew the state of my mind from week to week and would not have listened to a suggestion of withdrawal; and, indeed, I took the

solemn vows at the age of twenty and could no longer withdraw and remain a Catholic. But I still, on the whole, with long racking periods of doubt, believed that proof would come, and night by night I lay, dressed, across my bed imploring God to let me feel convinced of his existence. No man ever sought God more conscientiously.

The approach of the priesthood created an emotional life in which, naturally, all doubt was suspended. I passed the examinations and, at the age of twenty-three, sustained the elaborate ceremony of ordination and, later. received the mighty power of forgiving sins. Thus I crossed from the more or less secluded quarters of the students to those of the mature friars, and the next few chapters will tell what I found there.

CHAPTER IV.

HEARING PEOPLE'S SINS.

I defer to a special chapter the broad question of the morals of priests and monks, and will say here only that, while the system naturally inspires a vast amount of hypocrisy, it is usually a petty and pitiful hypocrisy. In a work written shortly after the close of my clerical experiences I find that I said that of ten monks or priests probably one was unusually pious, one immoral, and eight no more or less religious than the average believer. The first figure may be an exaggeration, the second an underestimate. I was only twenty-eight when I quitted that weird world, and it is usual to keep scandals as far as possible from the ears of earnest young men. When, as I described, one of our preachers cast off his robe and fled, my learned superior and friend deliberately lied to me—knowing that I would not lie to inquirers—and said that the man had gone on the foreign missions. Lies of that kind are common and consecrated.

The life may, therefore, be more charged with grave offenses than I know, yet I am disposed to repeat my general statement. It is the universal, all-pervading petty hypocrisy, the constant effort to pose as ascetic before the people and make life tolerably comfortable behind their backs, which disgusts one. Even on reli-

gious principles the monastic life is intolerable in its strict theory to all but a few hundred fanatics in any civilization. I have been sufficiently amongst monks of all orders to know that it is the same everywhere. Once, comparing notes after my secession with a man who had seceded from the Passionist body, I observed that the Trappist monks alone were genuine monks. He laughed, for he had spent weeks amongst them; and I may add that this man, then a protestant curate with little prospect of advancement and little money for drink, deserted his wife and child a few weeks after he had assured me of his contempt for Roman doctrines and returned to his comfortable monastery.

At least, I thought, the famous Grande Chartreuse of France was a model monastery. Some years later a traveler in their famous liqueur told me how, when he had to spend a night at the great monastery, he took with him a supply of salacious French and Spanish illustrated papers and he and a group of the monks emptied many bottles over them. Few can fathom the depth of the hypocrisy of the system; nor has it ever been otherwise. No monastic body was ever founded that was not corrupted within fifty years. My Franciscan fraternity was corrupt before Francis of Assisi died, and in the twentieth century it is a gross and stupid anachronism, a sordid and calculated bit of hypocrisy.

In America and England monks are more or less reconciled to the life into which they have been inveigled in their youth because, like

ordinary (or "secular") priests, they undertake the charge of parishes. Indeed, their supposed superior sanctity makes their churches more attractive to the faithful, and their parishes are generally large and prosperous. I found, therefore, that the life of the monk was a dreary compromise. He rose at five, donned the brown robe and sandals, and passed the early morning as I have described. The body of the morning was a trial to him, since he was forbidden to go out without special call. Hardly one of the monks could or would read a serious book, and the hours until the midday meal were spent largely, in defiance of the strict rules, in each others rooms or in conversation in the library. Women are never admitted into a monastery. That would be too dangerous a rule to relax. But there are one or two small "parlors" generally with glass doors, near the entrance, which are outside the general "closure," and women often came in the morning for a "consultation" which helps to pass the time agreeably. On the whole my colleagues found these hours tedious, for hardly one of them had any intellectual interest.

Recreation (talk) followed dinner, then more prayers and a bowl of tea, and with great alacrity the friars exchanged their brown robes for blackcloth, to visit the ladies, as all ministers of religion do. We will return to the point. But if it were not for this modern alleviation of the rules few would persevere in the monastic life. Supper at seven and further prayers were supposed to be followed by a profound silence until bed-time at nine-thirty.

There was, of course, no silence. The only two rules I knew the friars to observe were those which forbade the admission of women (for fear of observers) or the playing of cards. Even the vow of poverty went to the winds, for the life as a priest compelled a man to keep money in his pockets and receive gifts from his admirers. The vow of obedience was not stressed, and as to the vow of chastity we shall see later.

Of this hybrid life I had little, for the authorities appointed me professor of philosophy even before I was ordained priest, and in a year or two I had in addition the spiritual charge of all the students in the college. I was confined to the monastery, and only once a week donned my black suit to accompany the students in their weekly walk. The latter was a tiresome charge for a scrupulous man, for I found my judgment of the spiritual fitness of students constantly ignored. In one case I discovered that a man of twenty-five or so whom I deemed quite unfit had given a few thousand dollars to the friary. He remained, and defied me. Another young Englishman of the same age and equally good education, in fact a man of a good legal family, complained secretly of my treatment of his friend. I approached him in a friendly way and was stunned to hear him flatly deny that he had made the complaint. The higher authority had expressly directed him, he told me later, to lie to me if I asked questions. Deliberate lying of this kind was not uncommon. It is sanctioned in the theological books as "mental reservation": which

means, "I have not done this *as far as you are concerned.*" The latter phrase you say to yourself. The poor Catholic laity!

But my character as a priest compelled me to discharge functions about the church which relieved the monotony. I said mass daily, thereby earning about a dollar a day for the house, preached occasional sermons, married and baptized. My first wedding was that of a Belgian named, I think, John James Gerard Pessers, and as the man stuttered heavily, his violent efforts to repeat his name almost sent me into convulsions at the altar. At a baptism, at which the priest puts questions to the sponsors in Latin, I once broke down when a youth, confusing two sets of questions, replied energetically "I renounce him" to the query whether he believed in God, and then accepted "the devil and all his works and pomps" with equal warmth. On another occasion a lady called me to the church for "a blessing." We had twenty blessings for all articles (from churns to marriage-beds) and conditions, but she blushingly refused to specify. I was too innocent at the time to notice her circumference, so I read a blessing at random and she was happily delivered of twins. A colleague of mine in Belgium, not knowing the Latin for either churn or bed, read the blessing of a marriage bed over a churn of cream.

I was in no hurry to begin that most picturesque of all the priest's functions, the hearing and forgiving of sins, but I was still only twenty-four when I was compelled to begin. To those who know nothing of these matters

I may explain that the confessional, or "box" as it is familiarly called, is rigorously partitioned into two or three compartments. The priest, in the central part, cannot touch a "penitent." They whisper to each other through an opening which is filled with a close metal gauze. Priests do not misconduct themselves in the confessional because they cannot, though they may make assignations. But confessions may be heard anywhere, and it is in the vestry or the home that the pretext of confession secures the desired secrecy.

Well do I remember the trepidating moment when for the first time I sat in the "box" and heard sins. My face was turned away, but I shuddered a little when I heard the swish of skirts. This was an innocent story, but a few days later I received my first shock. A neurotic girl in her early twenties entertained me for half an hour with a detailed and repeated account of a heavy *liaison* with a very fleshy colleague of mine that had covered several years. She made the details graphic; she almost, I thought, seemed to smack her lips over them, while she professed profound sorrow. And, as I returned from church to monastery, one of my colleagues stood by the door and asked: "How did you get on with Norah?" She was a notorious neurotic of the confessional. Her story, I found later, was true, but she had told it to a score of priests and had been watching for the day when the name of the innocent "Father Anthony" would appear over a confessional so that she might have the luxury of telling it afresh.

That is the morbid side of the confessional. Most of the work is routine and innocuous, though profoundly silly. One wonders when Catholics will learn that it was not until the Middle Ages that the Church invented this ignominious obligation, and that it is one of the most transparent pieces of priestcraft. At all events, the majority just "scrape their kettles," as Catholic boys irreverently say, with more or less discomfort and depart. There is, however, a strict obligation on the priest to ascertain the degree of the sin before he gives absolution, and this naturally compels the priest to ask detailed questions, especially if the offense is sexual. Only a few months ago I heard a Roman Catholic author explain to a friend that a priest is not obliged to ask questions in the confessional. He was entirely wrong. The priest must know the gravity of a sin before he can absolve and impose penance. and it is obvious that in the matter of sex (in which, I should imagine, the Church has created about a hundred different species of sins) this involves close examination. A man or youth generally declares his transgressions in plain English right away, but a girl or young woman murmurs at first "I have been rude" or "immodest," and so on, and a priest sins himself if he passes that vague confession.

You can imagine the sordid and painful dialogue which follows, especially in the case of a sensitive young woman. If you ask at once too blunt and advanced a question, there may be a gasp of horror. You have at times

to go almost through the whole category of sex-transgressions. In thought only or action? With yourself or another? To what point of sensation? If with another . . . And so on. If I were to affirm that priests and girl penitents are never demoralized by this procedure, my reader would, I hope, smile.

I was not demoralized except in this sense, that in my last clerical year or so, when my faith wavered, I refused to ask the sordid questions and I endeavored to avoid hearing confessions. But I had three or four years' experience of the system, and I think now with astonishment of these crowds of Catholic women and girls confessing their "sins" to a man once a month, as is the custom. I was young and I, being confined to the monastery as a professor, knew more of the people personally. Men tell me also that I was almost handsome in those spiritual days. . . At all events, queues of girls and young women waited outside my "box" on Saturday nights to confide to me their sins.

I repeat that the majority are decent folks, uncontaminated (from the religious point of view) by this sacred license to talk freely to a man about sex. But large numbers of them yielded. I remember many types. A girl of sixteen—I happened to know who it was—asked me demurely: "Is it a sin to interrupt your prayers at night to follow a call of nature?" Presently, a little conscience-smitten, she confessed: "I have made a plot with other girls to put embarrassing questions to priests." At the other end of the scale is the thoroughly

demoralized and neurotic type I have described. She is free to repeat her amorous adventures, no matter how often she has been absolved, on the pretext that she is not quite sure that the sin is yet forgiven. Such girls roam from church to church seeking priests to whom it will be a satisfaction to talk.

Another type was far from neurotic: a very fleshy servant girl, a butcher maid, who suddenly discovered—after probably avoiding the confessional from one end of the year to the other—that it was spiritually helpful to her to confess her sins weekly to *me*. There was "nothing human that was foreign to her." All who knew her were familiar with her lasciviousness, and she told me all, in detail with rolling tongue, every week. Once she confessed that some other priest had forbidden her to come to confession to me. It was merely a new sex-indulgence. Others, far less bold, I noticed increasing the frequency of their confessions, and their moving limbs, as they knelt to confess, told why. It was a consecrated pleasure.

These types are, of course, a small minority. I would be the last to slander Catholic women and girls as a body, though Lea's very conscientious work on the confessional shows that, the world over, it has wrought a vast amount of evil. To me the stupidity, the transparent priestcraft, of it is its most vulnerable side. The idea that the Catholic *must* confess at least once a year or go to hell is one of the grossest and most wanton fabrications of the

Papacy, and the sole object is plainly to deepen the slavery of the laity to the clergy.

Most priests become tolerably cynical about it. They are not only permitted, but encouraged, to compare notes, provided that individual penitents are not named or identifiable, and they tell strange and often humorous stories. One fat little friar I knew, whose constant jokes were far from spiritual, used to tell of a boy of thirteen who, when asked what he had done since his last confession, at once rattled off: "Seventeen b——s, thirteen b——s, and twenty-three d——s." Another priest told that, hearing a disturbance, a quarrel about precedence, outside his "box" one night, he went out to secure order, when a boy cried: "Please, father, I was next to the woman who stole the silk umbrella." An Irish lawyer once told me an authentic experience of an aunt of his, who went to confess to a bishop whom she often entertained. "I cheated at cards," she said. "I *knew* you did," said the bishop, turning upon her with an air of annoyance.

Enter any Catholic church on Saturday night and you will see one of the most pitiful comedies that are to be seen in a modern civilization. Hundreds of men and women, boys and girls, are there to tell their sins to a priest and receive absolution. It is grotesque. It is to a large extent demoralizing. In such countries as America and England the confessional is, as I said, little used for immoral purposes, and only a minority of girls yield morbidly to its opportunities. But there is a general tendency of the institution to relieve coarse

people from that fear of hell which is said to intimidate them from sin. The Catholic theory of it, which you hear in sermons or read in apologetic works, is very far removed from the human actuality.

CHAPTER V.

REAL AND UNCLEAN MONKERY.

I imagine an American Catholic reading my pitiless exposure of the system, which is just the same in the States as in England, and objecting that this is not real monasticism. These are "missionary lands." The Church is in a minority. The monks must undertake parochial work, and it is impossible for them to display the conventual life in all the purity and beauty of Catholic countries.

This is the Catholic way. We are asked to admire the theory, not the reality: to believe that the faith is beautiful a few thousand miles away if a little malodorous under our noses. Fortunately, I had experience of monastic life in a Catholic country. In the year 1893 some rearrangement of our sources of study left me without pupils for a year, and I was sent to Louvain University, in Belgium, to study Hebrew and Syriac.

Of the studies I will say only that I had an excellently taught first year in Hebrew, under Van Hoonacker, whom I followed also for biblical criticism, and the mere elements of Syriac

from Lamy, a first-rate Syriac scholar, but a teacher of such a type that my two fellow-students could not read a single simple sentence in Syriac at the end of the year. I joined also the course of philosophy under (Cardinal) Mercier, of whom I became a close friend, but he advanced very little beyond the medieval stuff I had myself taught for two years. It was plain to me that these abler professors were by no means men of undisturbed faith, but even to me they spoke with the utmost diplomatic caution on matters of faith.

Here I may note why I am not "Dr." McCabe. The spleen of my religious opponents sometimes takes the form of pointing out that, though I studied at a university, I have no degree. I have in my autobiography explained why. My monastic body strictly forbade any member to compete for or accept a degree. It was against our "humility." Mercier talked to me about philosophy on equal terms and told me that the university would at any time give me its Ph.D., but my rules were inexorable. No Franciscan monk has, or can have, a degree.

There is a large Franciscan friary at Louvain and I lived in it for a year. From the moment of my arrival I put away my black suit, and

for twelve months I wore the garb, even when traveling over Belgium, and lived the entire life of a monk. There were between twenty and thirty monks in the monastery, and they had no parochial duties and no civic restrictions whatever. Even the railways were instructed to humor our strange ways and accept coupons from us, so that we need not touch that abominable invention of the devil, money. I did not touch a coin for a year.

And I did not have a bath for a year, but I guess that I drank wine and beer enough to fill, several times, even a Hollywood bath. That is symptomatic. In our London friary we had one bath (to about thirty people). It was in the attic or loft, and one asked permission at rare intervals to use it. I believe that most of the London monks, who had been trained in Belgium, never bathed; and some of them moved in quite high Catholic society. In no monastery in Belgium—I visited quite a number—was there a bath. The theory was that of a French nun who, when a new pupil asked if she might have a bath, said: "But God would see you naked!" It was a matter of chastity.

In short, these real monks seemed to have as one of their fundamental maxims: Cleanliness is next to vice. We washed daily, it is true.

I found that the real costume of a Franciscan monk consists of two brown tunics, a thinner inner tunic (of cloth) and the rough brown robe. The inner tunic, from neck to ankles, is worn day and night, but washed occasionally. There was, besides, a quaint white calico garment, a loin-cloth, which intrigued me. It was worn next the skin at the waist and washed weekly. The monks opened bovine eyes, then laughed aloud, when I asked what it was for. Still, at the age of twenty-five, I was not sexually developed; but my colleagues, mostly sons of small farmers, ate and drank like troopers, took no exercise, and did no work. Verb. sap.

In this inner, tight-fitting tunic, in which they had slept, most of the friars came to the lavatory in the morning to wash. A friar is his own chamber-maid. Theoretically none can enter another's room. The theory seems to be that they cannot be trusted to do a hundred things which are trifles of a normal man's life. So most of these ponderous Belgian friars brought with them, besides their towel, a certain vessel to empty, and, since it was against our poverty to have luxurious tin basins in the battered zinc trough (like a long horse-trough) many of them washed in their chamber-vessels. I became so accustomed to seeing

this that in my first book I said it lightly. Today I feel it may be necessary to say that I speak quite literally. Very many of the friars washed their faces in these vessels every morning. The only soap provided or permitted was the crudest soft soap. The toilets had no water supply. They emptied into a large tank, and its contents were economically used on the garden. We grew our own vegetables and fruit.

Why describe such things in America, one may say! There is far more of this grossness in religious houses in America, especially institutions or schools kept by foreign "brothers," than most Catholics suspect. I have been authentically informed by a youth who had passed through one of these that for certain sex-delinquencies a boy was compelled to strip and daub himself all over with human dung. This is in enlightened Illinois. I have myself heard confessions in such an institution and the frame of mind of some of the sturdy confessing brothers appalled me. When; a few years ago, I wandered through Bulgaria and Serbia, nothing surprised me. I had once lived in a real monastery.

Actual poverty has nothing to do with these matters. I found no monastery in Belgium which was ever short of money. Admiring

Catholics pay heavily for the prayers and masses of these "holy" men, and some Catholic layman consents to be the treasurer or "syndic" of the monastery, so that they need not handle the filthy lucre. Peasants swarm in tens of thousands to these fragrant centers of holiness, and each, when he has kissed a relic or prayed before a "miraculous" statue, flings a small coin into the sanctuary.

They have plenty of money, and the table groans with food. It is true that they observe the long fasts of the Church, but to men of their camel-like stomachs and idle life this is not onerous. In the morning, on a fast day, they have as much coffee (with sugar and milk) as they will and two ounces of bread. At three they have a pint of beer and six ounces of food, not too scrupulously weighed. But the midday dinner! A rich soup (vegetable, milk, or on feast days claret, soup) is followed by abundant eggs, then small mountains of fish and vegetables, then bread, butter, cheese, a pint of beer, and coffee. Festivals sometimes occurred in the middle of a fast, and the dinner—the one meal permitted on a fast day—would last two hours and would be followed by a further hour of wine-drinking. The monks at Louvain drank about thirty bottles

of wine on such occasions, and each had three pints of strong ale every day. Supplies were got into the monastery with as much secrecy as possible, by a specially constructed gate, on account of neighbors. The total amount of drink consumed in all these continental monasteries is enormous. The least excuse—the visit of a monk from another monastery, the unaccustomed prospect of a bit of work to do, etc.—sufficed to get another pint or two of beer; and the youngest students, of sixteen or seventeen years, had to drink three pints a day.

With all this drinking and the heavy feeding they took little or no exercise. At times during the day one of them might shuffle heavily round the garden or be called to visit and bless a sick Catholic somewhere, but they were, on the whole, just cast-iron feeding and drinking machines. Their spirituality may be imagined. Of their morals in the narrower sense I know nothing for my "pride" made me a suspected person from the first week and I was never in their confidence. In my letters to England I fully expressed my disdain. The superior of a monastery is supposed to read all letters sent and received, but he did not know English, and it was late in the year when I learned that he took every letter of mine to a monk who

knew English to be interpreted. I wondered no longer that I was unpopular.

Of intellectual life they were quite devoid. One priest whom I suspected to have some native ability was so debased by his open and appalling gluttony that he could do no more than help in the kitchen. Others passed the day, apart from the long and dreary hours of prayer, in an unimaginable idleness, waiting for meals. It was one of the friars themselves who told me, when I asked how they were recruited, that they got the "scum of the streets." Many were, frankly, pigs, and hardly any able to read a serious book. Mercier, who knew well how I suffered, gave me the run of his private library, and one day, when I had brought home Paul Janet's philosophical work *Final Causes* and was reading it, a friar looked over my shoulder. "Final cause—oh, a book about death," he muttered. The University of Louvain offered free education to any they cared to send to it, yet of their hundreds of monks and students they sent only two every year, and one of the two, in my year, was a plowboy with the brain of an ox.

Monasticism in Catholic lands, in other words, is a more sordid piece of hypocrisy than in America or England. The monks are mainly

fat sensualists and gluttons, much subject to apoplexy. Their long prayers are of as much value as the turns of a Chinese prayer-wheel. Their fasts are a mockery. Their poverty and avoidance of money are a hollow sham. Rome knows all this perfectly well, for each monastic body has a central establishment in Rome and "visitors" are sent annually to the different countries to examine minutely the state of affairs and encourage secret denunciations of each other by the monks. A Dutch monk with whom I once curiously got into touch had taken this arrangement seriously and had denounced the conditions of the friaries in Holland. He was in consequence, he said, detained in his cell for years and not permitted to communicate with anybody. Yet Rome sustains the whole morbid and contemptible system, and encourages it by lowering the age of admission, because the Catholic laity are totally deceived as to the life in the monastery and are taught to feel a pride in this unique spiritul efflorescence of their faith.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MORALS OF MODERN MONKS.

The morals of monks and nuns have been notorious ever since the quaint species made its first appearance in Europe. It was in the fourth century that Egypt, which seems to have inherited the folly from the later and more degenerate days of the old Egyptian religion, sent monks to Europe, and within half a century we find their patron, St. Jerome, bitterly deploring their greed and St. Augustine, in his book *On the Work of the Monks*, penning a comprehensive and severe indictment of "this pretended holiness." In every subsequent age new orders—that is to say, new reforms of the system—appeared and rapidly degenerated. It is not merely Rabelais and Boccaccio, Erasmus and Ulrich von Hutten, who excoriate them, but nearly every Christian writer of the Middle Ages, from Abelard onward, attributes to them an almost world-wide sexual license.

The Catholic apologist who despairs of meeting this indictment in the open field—in the domestic enclosure he can, of course, say what

he likes—contends that at least the gaiety is over; and certainly there are now few lands where millions of hostile eyes do not watch the monasteries. One third at least of the population even of Belgium is anti-Catholic. We will admit that the growth of heresy has reduced the immorality of Catholic priests and monks, and it is piquant to study the relation of the two phenomena. As late as 1870 (the end of the Papal rule in Italy), an elderly friend told me, an obviously pregnant woman opened the doors for him when he visited an Italian monastery. In the island of Capri in 1904 I met and conversed with a hermit, a brown-robed sturdy-looking man in his thirties, who gave me a glass of excellent wine from his cellar in the ruins; and a friend, who lived near, told me that the peasant women paid him for his holy prayers with "wine, food and their daughters." I was in Rome that year with the American consul of a certain Italian town, a man with an intimate knowledge of Roman society; and he assured me that Cardinal ————, a hot favorite for the Papacy, a cardinal who has more than once waved his blessing over pious crowds in the United States, had a mistress and children living openly in a Roman suburb. I refused to believe it, but

later I had confirmation from an indisputable source.

The truth is that there is still a very large amount of immorality amongst priests and monks, but it is now called "scandal" and concealed as much as possible. Let the reader estimate the probabilities. Of the fifty or so members of the English Province of the Franciscan Order, to which I belonged, not more than half a dozen were men of genuine piety who could be regarded as superior to temptation. The rest were men of average religious sentiment, or none, insufficient occupation except ón Saturday night and Sunday (both nights ending with a good drink), and feeble intellectual interests. Moreover, the opportunities of the priest or monk are incomparable, and all drink.

In spite of the fact that a skeptical literary man of amorous ways once told me that he "liked Catholic women because they were so easy to induce," I hold them, as a body, equal to any others. Their own legend that they are superior is, of course, a fond conceit. They are human; and every afternoon, when the men-folk are at work and the children at school, a swarm of priests and monks are skipping from house to house visiting the ladies, whether

there is a servant in the house or no. A judge generally takes a serious view of testimony that a man and woman spent an hour together in a house without witnesses.

What amount of looseness occurs in these conditions no man can tell. If, as is rare, misconduct in such circumstances becomes known, the bishop or the monastic superior uses his influence to suppress the scandal. But I saw enough, in spite of my youth and special occupation as professor, to be able to say positively that a very large proportion of monks and priests indulge.

I have referred to a friar who fled with the contents of the treasury to a cabaret in Brussels, and later made a second attempt. He visited ladies in their homes every day for years before and after these obvious displays of lack of principle. Another English friar did much the same thing, bolting with all the money he could annex from the funds. More than one in ten of my colleagues "apostatized" in my time, and in no case except my own was there a plea of intellectual difficulties. More than one in ten of those who remained—largely because few of them could earn any sort of living outside—got drunk occasionally. Few showed any delicacy about rules. One, as I

said, had a *liaison* for years with a young Catholic girl, and at his death it was openly discussed by my colleagues. One was transferred from his monastery because a Catholic lady of the district was sarcastically given his name by the other Catholic women. Another was transferred for misconduct that became public. The most learned of them all was so closely and habitually associated with a girl of seventeen that few did not smile at it.

They were just ordinarily sensual men, unmarried, with quite exceptional opportunities for indulgence. I heard few serious confessions from them because, by an ingenious system of "reserved cases," the *young* monk cannot absolve his colleagues from sex-sins and he hears little. Amongst the clergy at large, however, I had full powers, and I soon learned that there was plenty of immorality, especially of a priest with his servant. One young priest sent for me, and he and his pretty housekeeper confessed that they slept together. It was not a full confession. I learned later, by accident but with certainty, that they were brother and sister. Another young priest confessed that he systematically arranged with girls to feign illness, take to bed, and send for him to hear their confessions, when he promptly joined

them. Others heard the confessions of women and girls in the sacristy (or vestry) and took that occasion. Others went occasionally to the nearest city in mufti. And repeatedly there were men of high reputation against whose virtue the Catholic laity would hear no suspicion. The most learned of my colleagues and authorities, Father David Fleming, a man who moved in the highest clerical circles, told me that the great Cardinal Manning had an illegitimate daughter in a London convent.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Through all this miserable period of dis illusion I kept my early problem before me. Heavy labor, intense study, and ill health rarely thrust long from my mind the chief purpose of my life during those twelve years: to find convincing and final proof of the fundamental principles of religion. From Louvain I returned with a deeper knowledge of philosophy, a fair knowledge of Hebrew and Syriac, more Greek, a fluent command of French, and a beginning of German. Except the Hebrew, which now rusts, useless, in my memory, the Church gave me none of these things. I am self-taught, and the prouder on that account of my acquirements. I returned to London to teach philosophy and pursue my private research.

This was in the summer of 1894. At that time, or during my year at Louvain, I seem to have been less troubled with doubt, since I remember writing for a young colleague (obviously in the throes of a doubt) a triumphant

Latin dissertation on the immortality of the soul. But when the strain of the university year was over the doubts returned. The hypocrisy and poverty of character around me never troubled my intellect, though they naturally darkened my emotional life. Always severely logical, I felt that the issue lay between me and Christ, and what others did mattered little. I had still, until the summer of 1895, no suspicion that I would eventually leave. If the gospel was true, I had, however others misbehaved, taken the surest route to heaven. But was there a heaven?

In 1894, I think, my sex-life began, but it troubled me, almost a chronic invalid, very little. I studied or prayed thirteen hours out of every twenty-four. I had exhausted the apologetic capacity of my old tutor and friend and he began to show hostility as I concealed myself from him. We had opened a new preparatory college in the country and I expressed a wish to take charge of it. The man seemed to sense that I merely wanted larger leisure to think, and he opposed me, but he was overruled, and in the fall of 1895 I was appointed head of the college and thus became, on the rules of our Order, the "Very Reverend" Father Antony (aged twenty-seven). I will not enlarge on the

miserable supply of aspirants to the priesthood or the complete ignorance of my one assistant teacher. My health improved, and, as soon as my organization of the place was completed, I fell upon my personal task. For months now I had been vaguely skeptical, but I wanted a clear formulation.

It was during the Christmas holidays that I found the occasion, and my procedure seems to amuse my friends. Directing that for some days I must receive no visitor or distraction, I sat down to draw up on paper all the arguments for and against God and immortality. . . . On Chirstmas morning I definitely concluded that I was doctrinally bankrupt, and from that day, thirty-one years ago, to this, no doubt about the soundness of my conclusion has ever clouded my mind. I must face life afresh. I talk no heroics. It was not a question of courage. To me it would have been preferable to die, as I at one time meditated, rather than continue without belief in that sorry system. I allowed a few weeks for possible change of sentiment, taking only one lady, who perceived my grave trouble, into my confidence. She betrayed me, of course, and they sent my old tutor to deal with me. On Ash Wednesday, 1896, I went out from the

shade of the cloister, to find "the world," which for twelve years had rung in my ears in association with "the flesh and the devil," more honest, sweeter, and more honorable than the folk who affected to despise it.

I must refer to my larger work for the details of my secession and the venomous conduct of the friars. They accused me of theft and sent the police to the house of the friend who sheltered me. They tried to drive me into poverty and despair; and of all the hundreds of the Catholic laity who had, a few weeks before, deeply honored me, not one understood or had a word of sympathy. From that day the Church has missed no opportunity to injure me, sometimes by the meanest and most cruel of intrigues. And I smile. "If any man smite me on one cheek, him do I smite promptly on both" (*Joseph*, XVI, 27).